



CHAPIN HALL

CENTER FOR CHILDREN
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



What High School Students in The Chicago Public Schools Do in their Out-of-School Time: 2003-2005

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Introduction

Since our last report on how ninth graders in the Chicago Public Schools spend their out-of-school time, there has been an increase in the attention paid to programs for youth when they are not in school. These programs have multiple goals – youth development, violence prevention, employment skills training, improved academic performance, the reduction of health risk behavior – and there is agreement among policymakers and advocates that more and improved programs are needed. A recent grant from the Wallace Foundation to the city underscores the willingness of both city government and private interests to build upon the success of After School Matters to provide high-quality comprehensive opportunities for youth.

This report provides a descriptive overview of what CPS high school students do in their out-of-school time, based on responses to a questionnaire administered to ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders.

For the past 3 years, we have collected information from Chicago Public Schools high school students on their after-school and weekend activities, what they want to do after school and where they want to do it, activities with their family members, their assessment of their neighborhoods and resources available to them, and measures about how they see themselves. In 2004, we prepared a report on the out-of-school time activities of ninth-grade students. In this report, we provide some additional information about CPS students in ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade across the topic areas.

Most Chicago public high schools have participated in the survey, and we greatly appreciate the time and energy it took staff to administer it. Most important, we appreciate how seriously students took the questionnaire and thought about the answers that they gave. The response that we got from both staff and students suggests that out-of-school time and knowing what happens during that time is important to them.

We could not have done this work without the strong cooperation and effort of principals, teachers, and central office staff of the Chicago Public Schools, and we greatly appreciate it.

This report comes at a time when after-school programs in Chicago and nationwide are receiving a great deal of attention. There are questions about the availability, quality, and effectiveness of these programs. What is really available for young people, and which young people are able to take advantage of such opportunities? How beneficial are these programs? What are the short- and long-term outcomes for youth? What are the challenges faced by organizations providing youth-serving programs? How can we improve the systems of support that are currently available for young people, the effectiveness of the schools and community organizations that serve them, or the ways in which youth participation in such opportunities can be increased and sustained?

This survey is part of a larger Chapin Hall project that includes in-depth interviews to get a richer understanding of young people’s perspectives on their neighborhoods, schools, and the after-school opportunities available to them.¹ It also includes an investigation of the “supply side”—what is available for youth in Chicago and how it is distributed across the city—including a survey of youth-serving agencies that will provide information on the availability of programs and the dynamics of provision in several Chicago communities.

We hope that the information provided by this study will be useful for a number of purposes. The primary purpose is to inform school and government leaders about the choices and desires of youth and their families so that better decisions can be made about what to offer them and how programs should be managed. The report can be used as a baseline for long-term efforts by public officials to evaluate the quantity and quality of after-school programs. Finally, we hope that this report will provide Chicagoans, in particular, with more information about their young people.

What we did

In Spring semester of 2004 and 2005, a questionnaire was administered to students in the Chicago Public Schools that chose to participate in the survey. School personnel administered the questionnaire primarily during the students’ advisory periods. In Spring of 2004, ninth and tenth graders were surveyed, and in Spring 2005, ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade students were included.

Students completed questionnaires that were administered to them by school personnel mostly during “advisory” or “division.”² Some schools completed the surveys in a special convocation. Schools then returned the questionnaires to Chapin Hall where they were scanned and entered into a database.

The response rate

For those schools that undertook the survey, response rates within schools were relatively high, given the average absenteeism in the high schools.

In Spring 2004, 47 percent of all ninth- and tenth-grade students completed a questionnaire. This constituted responses from 93 out of the 115 high school units. In Spring 2005, the response was not as strong. Thirty percent of all ninth-, tenth-, and

¹ See Chaskin, Robert J. and Stephen Baker. 2006. *Negotiating Among Opportunity and Constraint: The Participation of Young People in Out-of-School-Time Activities*. (Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children). This report addresses how and why young people get involved in after-school activities, their assessments of what makes for quality programs, the barriers they face in participating, and their perspectives on the kinds of opportunities they would most like to have available to them.

² This time period may be called different things in different schools and is also of different lengths of time in different schools.

eleventh-grade students completed a questionnaire. This constituted responses from 53 out of the 128 high school units.

However, when we combine the responses from these 2 years, we have completed questionnaires from 63 percent of the active students in the 2004-2005 school year. This combined data provides sufficient numbers of youth from all Chicago communities and all racial and ethnic groups to allow our results to be representative of all CPS students in these grades and to reflect the diversity of these youth.³

We report on ninth-, tenth- and eleventh-grade students if the school participated in the survey during the 2004-2005 school year. If they did not participate in that year, we use their responses from the 2003-2004 school year for ninth and tenth graders. After analyzing differences across grades and across years, we found that pooling these results do not bias them in any particular way. In the coming year, we will analyze students from all four grades.

Participation in a structured activity

We found that 25 percent of students are engaged in a structured activity after school *on any one day*, which is very similar to the statistic reported for ninth graders in our first report (see Figure 1). These include activities that provide “structured” opportunities to develop skills, learn new things, and have fun, such as school, community, and religious programs, private lessons, and community service.

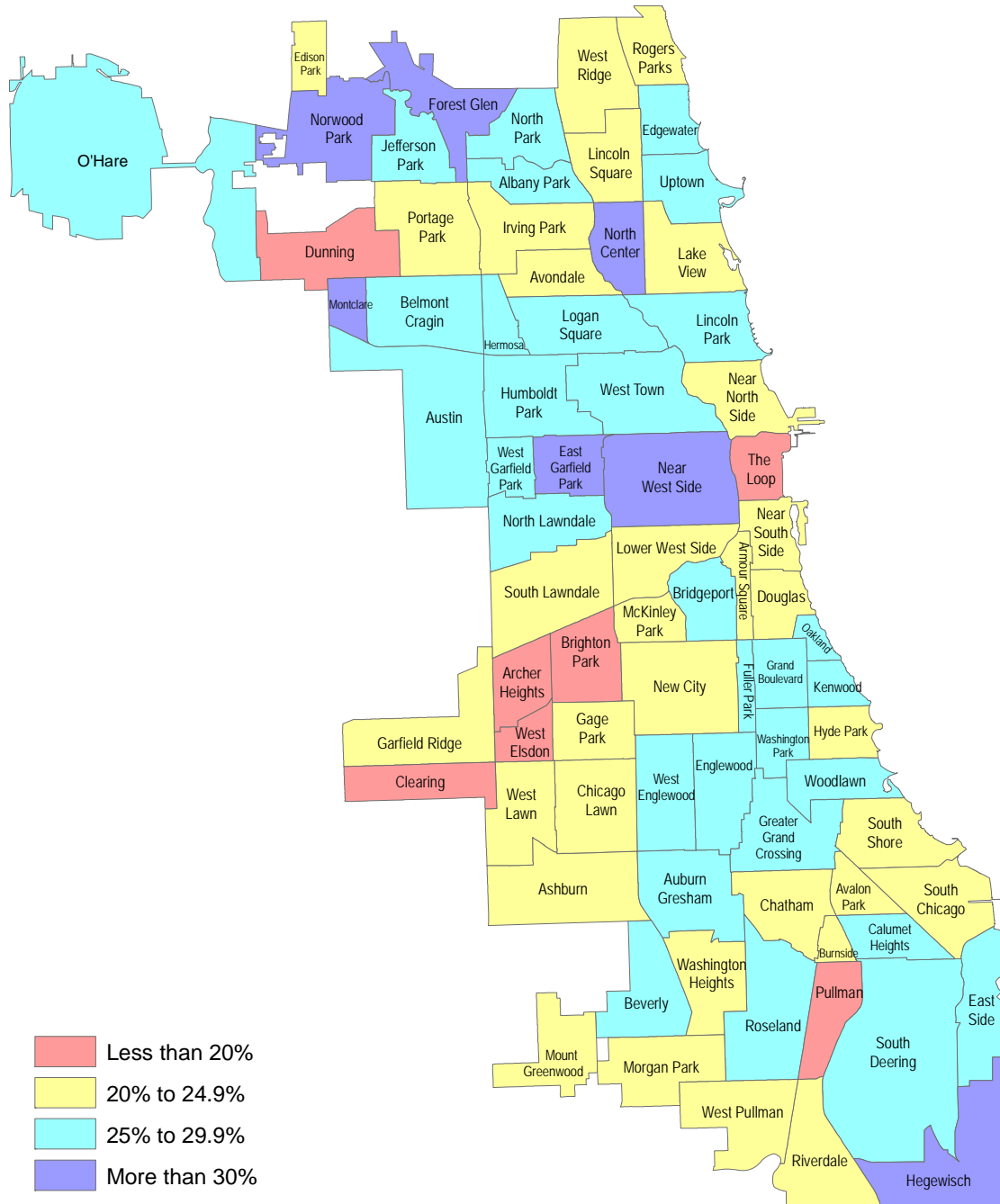
The percent of students participating in a structured activity varies from school to school and community within Chicago. It ranges from 12 percent to 38 percent in the schools that participated and from 11 to 42 percent across the Chicago community areas (see Figure 1 of report).

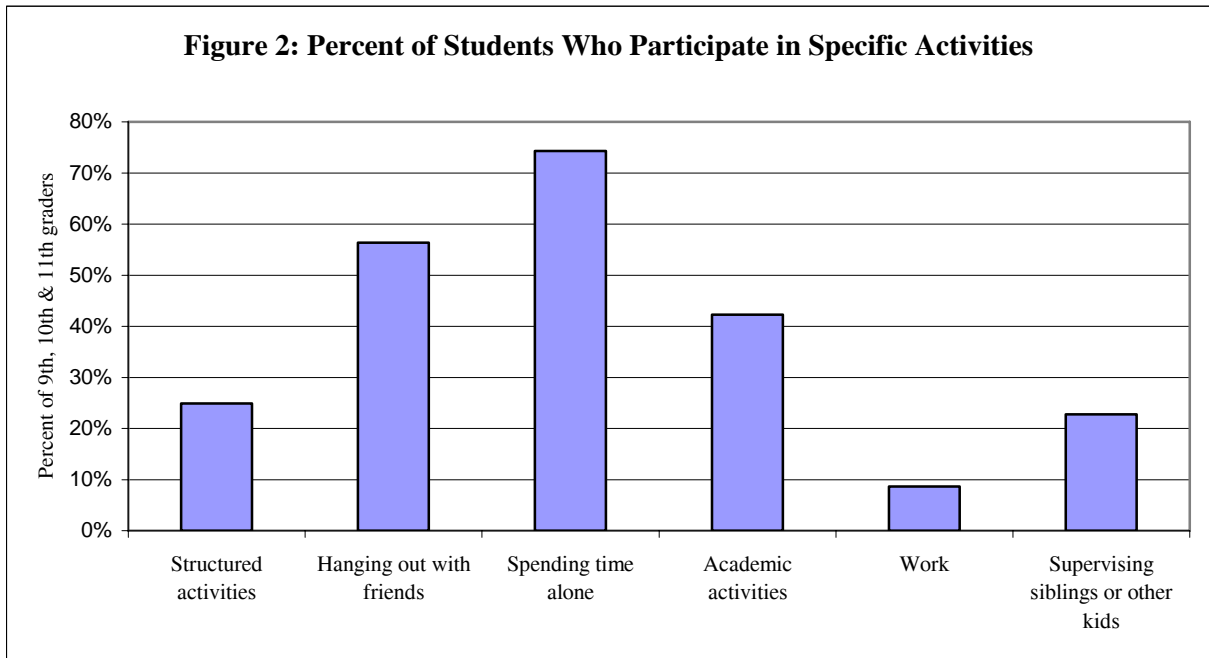
Participation in an academic activity

We found 42 percent of students engaged in academic activities, including homework or a tutoring program (see Figure 2). The percent of students participating in an academic activity varies from school to school and community within Chicago. It ranges from 22 percent to 65 percent in the schools that participated and from 16 to 53 percent across the Chicago area communities.

³ Details on the response rates and other methodological issues are available from the authors.

Figure 1. Percent of Students Participating in Structured Activities by Chicago Community Area





Students not engaged in activities or work

In addition to the structured and academic activities, many students are engaged in jobs that they or their family need them to do. Other students may want to be engaged in either structured, academic, or work-related activities, but for some reason are not.

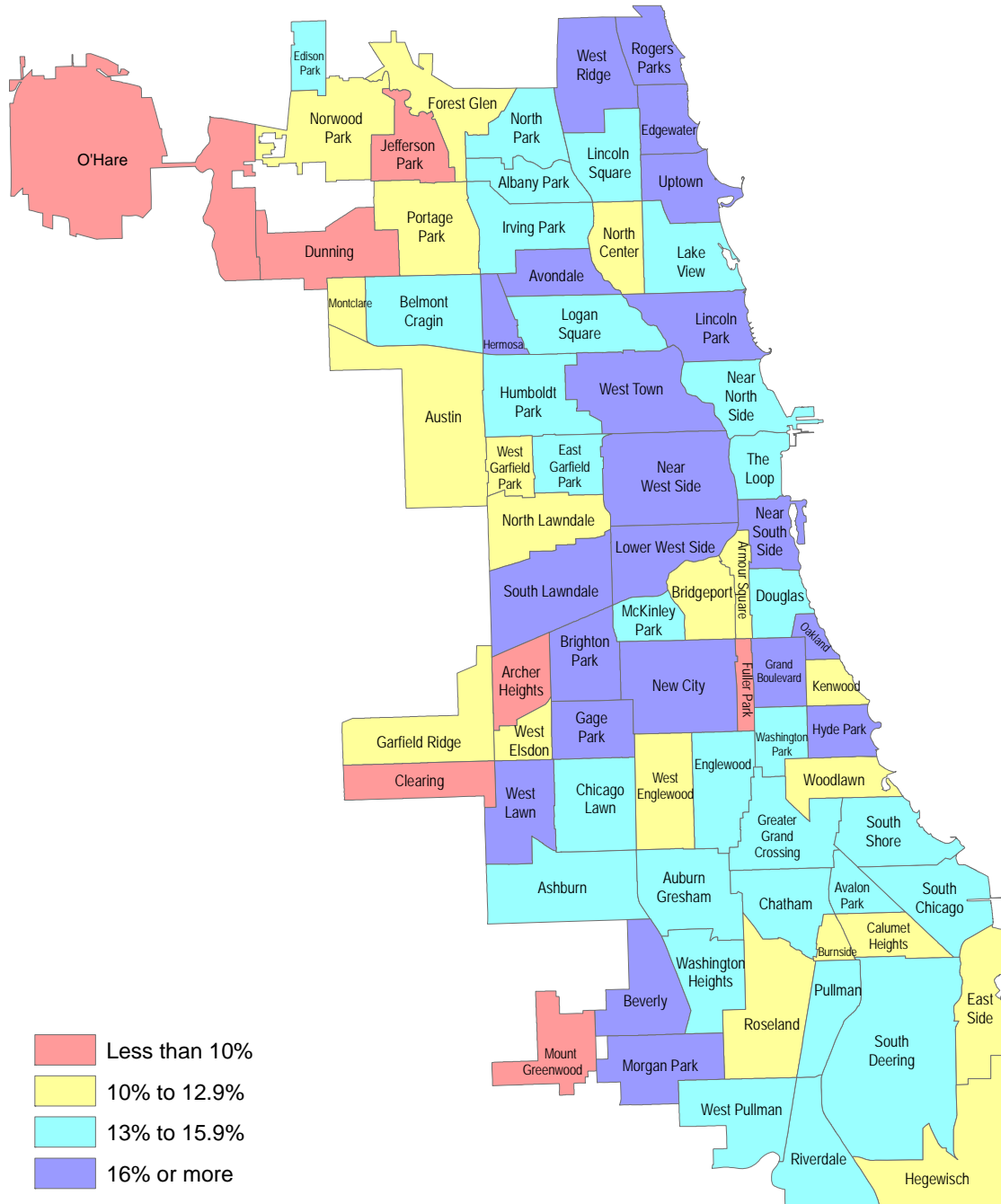
Across Chicago, we found that 35 percent of students are not engaged in a structured or academic activity, a job, or taking care of younger siblings on any day. This varied by school and by community. It ranges from 18 percent to 50 percent in the schools that participated and from 19 to 55 percent across the Chicago community areas.

Twenty-two percent of youth are taking care of siblings after school. This ranges from 13 percent to 36 percent across the participating schools and from 5 to 31 percent across the Chicago area communities. Eleven percent of youth are working on any particular day.

What students want to do after school

About 14 percent of those students who are not participating in a structured activity would like to participate in one. This varies tremendously by school from 8 percent to 24 percent and by community from 7 to 20 percent (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percent of Students Not Engaged in Structured Activities Who Want to Be



Students home alone without adult supervision

About one-third of students are at home unsupervised for some part of the after-school period. They may either be alone or with younger or older siblings, but no adults are in the home. This varied by 22 percent to 47 percent in the Chicago community areas.

Students' assessment of places and activities in their neighborhood

A number of factors outside of a student's control may in fact contribute to the still relatively modest rates of engagement in structured after-school activities. The availability of after-school opportunities and the characteristics and dynamics of life in the neighborhoods in which students live appear to be critical barriers to participation for many young people.

For example, 55 percent of the students in the survey said that they have no safe places like parks or community centers to go. This varied by school and by community ranging from 25 percent to 75 percent in the schools that participated and from 20 to 70 percent across the Chicago community areas.

Future aspirations of youth

Nearly 60 percent of students say that their chances of going to college are high or very high. This ranges from 24 percent to 84 percent in the schools that participated and from 32 to 80 percent across Chicago community areas.

Future work

We will be conducting further analyses to explore a variety of factors, such as neighborhood, ethnicity, and gender, which might contribute to differences high school students' involvement in after-school activities. The next report will include all grades 9-12 through the 2005-2006 school year.



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